THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S ABILITY
TO EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS AS A PREDICTOR
OF MOTHER-CHILD CONFLICT

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Abstract. In this study, pre-school children (36 – 72 months) examined whether their ability to express their positive and negative feelings has a predictive effect on their level of conflict with their mothers. For this purpose, data were collected from the mothers of 594 children, who were educated in the kindergartens in Denizli province centre during the fall semester of 2017 – 2018. "Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale – Mother Form" was used to determine children's ability levels of expressing their emotions and "Child-Parent Relationship Scale" was used to determine children's levels of conflicts with their mothers. In the analysis of the data, the stepwise linear multiple regression analysis was used to learn power of the children's ability to express their feelings of happiness, sadness, anger and fear in the prediction of their conflict levels with their mothers. Prior to the analysis, the suitability of the data set for regression analysis was examined in terms of the normality test, autocorrelation and multiple correlation problems, and the necessary assumptions were met. The findings of the study reveal that the children's expressing their feelings of anger, sadness and happiness are significant predictors of mother-child conflict. In this context, the expression of anger feeling is a positive predictor of mother-child conflict, while expressing feelings of sadness and happiness are negative predictors of mother-child conflict. Finally, it has been seen that expressing fear has no predictive effect on the mother-child conflict.
Keywords: pre-school children; emotions; emotional expression; mother-child relationship; mother-child conflict

Introduction

When it is considered from the perspective of birth and the first years of life, human beings are the most perfect of living beings in nature, and they first see the light of day in the most helpless way and in need of care, compared to other beings (Basal, 2012). The survival of a born baby entirely depends on adults. It is not enough for a baby to have a caregiver, at the same time, the baby needs to have a very strong relationship with this caregiver (Bornstein, Suwalsky & Breakstone, 2012).

It is the mother of a child who has had the first interaction with the child since the birth and has the closest relationship. The mother can be considered to be the most effective person in the child's life for not only meeting the physiological needs but also emotional needs such as warmth, closeness, and trust (Cagdas, 2009). This early and important relationship between mother and child is explained in the context of attachment theory. Attachment can be described as a strong emotional connection that allows an individual to be happy and secure while he/she is together with the special people in their personal life, and to be relieved at the times of stress and sadness with their help (Berk, 2013). In this sense, Bowlby (1982) emphasizes that attachment and caregiver sensitivity is very important, especially in the first year of life. According to Bowlby, universally, all babies need to look for intimacy with their loved ones when they are stressed or threatened (Prior & Glaser, 2006). The basis for the continuity of parent-child relationship is usually determined by the attachment status of the infant (Papp, 2009). However, besides the exceptions, the first person to care for the baby is the mother who is emotionally and reliably connected (Lier, 1988, Acar Sengul & Yukselen, 2015). Bowlby emphasizes that the positive and close relationship between mother and child is the basis for the development of the child (Yavuzer, 2010). This is because of the fact that, among the many different relationships that individuals make for life, it is thought that the relationship of mother and child is the most important one (Malekpour, 2007). The results of the study on the basis of attachment suggest that the emotional relationships between mother and child have positive effects on the cognitive and social development of preschool children (Bretherton, 1985).

The way that a mother responds to her child's behaviours opens the way for making a better development. On the contrary, a mother who does not accept responsibility for the child's care, interacts improperly, or does not accept the child can cause serious distress during the child's development (Gežová, 2015). The studies have shown that children who have negative and conflict-based relationships with their mothers at an early age are not able to adapt to their environment during adolescence, youth, and even in adulthood (Oktay, 2007).

Children learn emotions in the family context (Erden, 2016). The relationship between mother and child is based on the emotions. These emotions are produced and organized within the framework of close relationships, just as between mother and child. The emotional development of children is primarily driven by the emotional processes of the mother and child (Hollenstein, Tighe & Lougheed, 2017). Emotional-based relationships with the child can set the ground for the child's feelings of trust or insecurity (Yavuzer, 2010). Emotions provide very strong social hints about how individuals feel in any situation/environment (Plotnik, 2009). Parallel to their emotional development, children experience various positive and negative feelings. The way children express their positive or negative feelings may vary. These differences can stem from the culture and family, or from the nature

of the child. However, the negative emotions experienced by children are very important in terms of frequency, intensity, and expression. The fact that children express their negative emotions in an unwanted or uncomfortable manner to others in the social environment leads to a variety of behavioural problems (Durmusoglu-Saltali, 2010), since these behaviours may impair children's harmony with their environment. From this point of view, the purpose of this study is to examine whether the ways in which preschool children express their positive and negative feelings in various situations has a predictive effect on their level of conflict with their mothers.

Research Method

Research Group

The study group was formed of 594 children who were educated in kindergartens in the Pamukkale and Merkezefendi districts in Denizli province, in the fall semester of 2017 – 2018 academic year. Among the children in the study group, 304 (51.2%) were male and 290 (48.8%) were female. The average age of the children is 4.12. All of the children have normal development and live with their parents.

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form

This form was created by the researcher to obtain the demographic data of the children included in the study group. The personal information form is based on questions about the children's age, gender, number of siblings, parents' education levels, and parents' cohabitation status.

Child Parent Relationship Scale

Originally developed by Pianta (1992), the Child Parent Relationship Scale aims to determine the relationship between parents and children. The original of the scale consists of three sub-dimensions as conflict, attachment and positive relationship. It is a five-point Likert-type scale, measured in accordance with the answers between "(1) definitely does not apply" and "(5) definitely applies". In the scale, there are positive and negative expressions and negative expressions are scored by reversing.

Adaptation of Child Parent Relationship Scale to Turkish was done by Akgun and Yesilyaprak (2010). Following the validation of the language and scope under the guidance of the experts, the construction validity was checked by collecting data from 234 parents. According to the exploratory factor analysis results, the Turkish version of the scale has two factors. The first sub-dimension obtained is called conflict and the second sub-dimension is called positive relationship. According to the reliability analysis of the scale, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of conflict sub-dimension was .85, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the positive relationship sub-dimension was .73 and total Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .73. Test-retest correlation coefficients for the scale were calculated as .98 for the conflict sub-dimension, and .96 for the positive relationship sub-dimension and for the total.

The Turkish form of the scale consists of 24 items. There are positive and negative expressions on the scale and positive expressions are scored by reversing. The high score on the scale indicates the negative relationship with the mother and the low score indicates the positive relationship between the mother and the child. The highest total score is 120 and the lowest is 24. Within the scope of this study, the construct validity scale of the Child Parent Relationship Scale was tested by confirmatory factor analysis with the recommendation of the specialists who adapted the scale to Turkish (Akgun & Yesilyaprak, 2010). The path diagram for the scale is presented in Fig. 1.
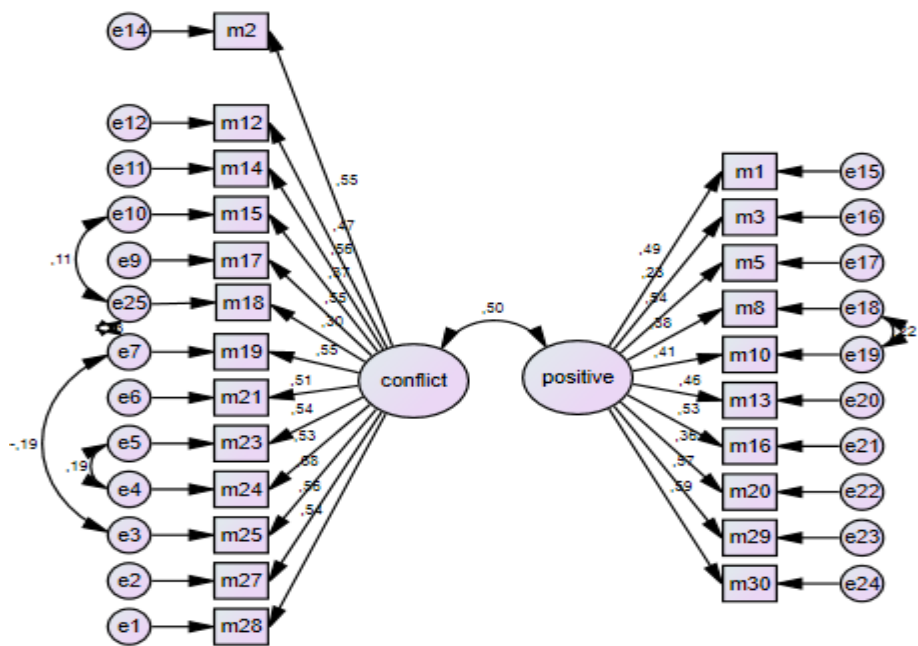

Figure 1. Path diagram for Child Parent Relationship Scale confirmatory factor analysis

As can be seen in Figure 1, the standardized factor loads for conflict and positive relationship subscales are between .28 and .87. Since the standardized factor load of item 7 in the conflict sub-dimension is .12, this item has been removed from the analysis. In the scale adaptation studies included in the literature, it has been seen that chi-square statistics, degrees of freedom (df) RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI, IFI and SRMR statistics were used (Akin & Tas, 2015, Akin, Uysal & Citemel 2013, Oral & Ersan, 2017). In this study, the mentioned compliance indexes were taken into account.

Table 1. Model Fit Indices Related to the Parental Relationship Scale

Model Fit Indices										
	χ 2	df	χ 2/df	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	SRMR
Expected Value			< 5	<.08	>.90	>.90	>.90	>.90	>.90	<.08
Calculated Value	680.174	224	3.03	.050	.91	.91	.93	.93	.92	.057

According to the fit indices given in Table 1, the construct validity of the Child Parent Relationship Scale seems to have a good fit.

Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale-Mother Form

The Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale is a measurement tool developed by Mirabile (2008) to assess the levels of expressing positive (happy) and negative (sad, angry and fear) feelings in preschool children aged 36 – 72 months. Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale aims to evaluate children's expressions of happiness, sadness, anger and fear in terms of frequency, duration, intensity and speed. Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale is a Likert-type measure consisting of 16 items, rated by the parent or teacher, between 1 (never) and 7 (always), having four items for expressing the feelings of happy, sad, angry and fear. The high score on the scale means higher frequency, longer duration, greater intensity and higher speed for each emotion. The frequency, duration, intensity and speed scores obtained from the scale are collected for each emotion and reveal the skill levels of children expressing positive or negative emotions. The scale has internal consistency at an acceptable level. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated as .57 for expressing sad feelings, .85 for expressing angry feelings, .75 for expressing fear feelings, and .76 for expressing happy feelings (Mirabile, 2014).

Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale is adapted to Turkish by Ersan (2017). In adaptation studies, the scale was measured with support from experts in terms of language validity and content validity. Scale validity assessment was completed with the help of pre-school teachers and mothers having children aged 36 – 72 months. The scale is called the Child Emotion Expressiveness Scale-Mother Form because it was to be answered by mothers who have 36 – 72 months old children. In addition, during the face validation process, the scale was revised as a 5-point Likert type, following the statements of teachers and the mothers. Data were collected from 298 parents to determine the validity of the scale. According to the confirmatory factor analysis results, the first item related to the happy sub-dimension was subtracted from the scale because it had a low factor load. According to the results of repeated analysis for the remaining 15 items, the fit indices were calculated as $x^2 / sd = 2.72$, RMSEA = .063, SRMR = .030, GFI = .94, AGFI = .92 and CFI = .95.

According to the reliability analysis results of the scale, happy subscale Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .70, sad subscale Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .75, angry subscale Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .83 and fear subscale Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was .83. Regarding the test-retest correlation coefficients for the scale, the happy subscale was .77, the sad subscale was .74, the angry subscale was .79, and fear subscale was .80 (Ersan, 2017).

Analysis of Data

For the assumption that the data have a normal distribution, the kurtosis and skewness coefficients are examined. The fact that the coefficients of kurtosis and skewness have values between -3 and +3 is considered to be an indicator of the fact that the data have a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2007). Stepwise regression analysis was used to find out the power of the children's ability to express happiness, sadness, anger, and fear emotions on their level of conflict with their mothers. Analyses were performed using SPSS 16.0 software.

Findings

The correlation between the variables discussed in the research and the results of the analysis regarding whether the children's expressing happiness, sadness, anger and fear emotions predict the levels of conflict with the mothers are presented below.

Table 2. Correlations between pre-school children's expression of happiness, sadness, anger and fear feelings and mother-child conflict levels

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Conflict	-				
2 Happy	-.248**	-			
3 Sad	.140**	-.235**	-		
4 Angry	.335**	-.181**	.624**	-	
5 Fear	.184**	-.178**	.629**	.516**	-
Mean	56.79	13.10	10.34	9.73	9.82
Standard deviation	2.08	1.61	2.83	3.12	3.22
Kurtosis	.565	-1.42	.023	.366	.468
Skewness	.114	1.76	-.461	-.111	.147

**p<.01

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that there is a significant correlation between pre-school children's levels of conflict with their mothers and their level of expressing happiness in the negative direction (r = -. 24). It is understood that children's levels of conflict with their mothers are positively correlated with levels of sadness (r = .14), anger (r = .33) and fear (r = .18) In the study, the suitability

of the obtained data for regression analysis was examined. The values of kurtosis and skewness for dependent and independent variables presented in Table 2 were found to be between -1.42 and 1.76. From this, it can be said that the assumption of normal distribution for the variables is provided. Similarly, when Pearson's correlation coefficients showing the binary relationships between the variables presented in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that there are no multiple connection problems among the variables. In addition, when the Durbin Watson test result given in Table 3 is considered, it can be said that there is no autocorrelation problem in the model. The Durbin Watson value is between 1.5 and 2.5, which is considered to be a sign of no autocorrelation in the model (Kalayci, 2009).

Table 3. Results of stepwise linear multiple regression analysis regarding the pre-school children's happiness, sadness, anger and fear emotions expressing levels' predicting the mother-child conflict level

Model	Predictive Variables	B	Std. Deviation	Beta	t	P	R	R²	Durbin Watson
1	(Stable)	35.503	1.37		25.872	.000	.335	.11	
	Angry	1.16	.13	.335	8.640	.000			
2	(Stable)	53.727	3.87		13.882	.000	,385	.15	
	Angry	1.03	.13	.300	7.763	.000			
	Happy	-1.30	.26	-.194	-5.022	.000			1.860
3	(Stable)	58.360	4.11		14.198	.000	,403	.16	
	Angry	1.36	.17	.392	8.134	.000			
	Happy	-1.42	.26	-.213	-5.488	.000			
	Sad	-.59	.18	-.154	-3.165	.002			

Model 1: F (1-592) = 74,646, p<.001
Model 2: F (1-591) = 25,217, p<.001
Model 3: F (1-590) = 10,018, p<.002

Considering the results of the analysis in Table 3, it is understood that the stepwise regression analysis is completed in three stages, and that the level of expression of anger, happiness and sadness is predicted by mother-child conflict and the level of expression of fear is not a predictor of mother-child conflict. In the first step, expressing anger emotion only accounts for 11% of the total variance (R = .33, R² = .11, F (1-592) = 74.646, p <.001). In the second stage, expressing happiness increased the explained total variance to 15% (R = .38, R² = .15, Model 2: F (1-591) = 25.217, p <.001), when included in the analysis. In the third stage, expression of sadness was included in the analysis and the total variance explained increased to 16% (R = .40, R² = .16, Model 3: F (1-590) = 10.018, p <.001). When the regression coefficients and t values are examined, it is understood that children's expressing their feelings of

anger are positive predictors of mother and child conflict, while children's expressing happiness and sadness are negative predictors of mother and child conflict. In other words, as the levels of anger expression in pre-school children increase, the level of conflict with their mothers increases. Conversely, as the levels of pre-school children's expressing happiness and sadness increase, their level of conflict with their mothers decreases. In addition, it is seen that the greatest contribution to the explained 16% total variance of mother-child conflict is due to the children's expressing their anger.

Conclusions and Suggestions
The findings of the research reveal that there is a negative relationship between the children's expression of happiness and the mother-child conflict. It is understood that there is a positive relationship between pre-school children's expressing feelings of anger, sadness, and fear and mother-child conflict. Findings from the regression analysis show that children's expressing their feelings of anger, happiness and sadness have a predictive effect on the level of mother-child conflict. Nevertheless, children's expressing the feeling of anger is a positive predictor of mother-child conflict, while children's expressing happiness and sadness are negative predictors of mother-child conflict. In the direction of research findings, as the level of anger expressed by pre-school children increases, levels of conflict with their mother increase, and levels of conflict with their mothers decrease as their happiness and sadness levels increase.

When the relevant literature is examined, there is no study that directly examines the relationship between children's emotional expressiveness and mother-child conflict in the context of available resources. There are studies that investigated the relations of the mother-child relationship with the children's psycho-social development (Dereli & Dereli, 2017), demographic variables of the children (Cakıcı, 2006; Saygi & Uyanik Balat, 2013), children's behavioural problems (Yuksek Usta, 2014), their peers (Gulay Ogelman, Korukcu & Ersan, 2015), moral and social norms (Ozyurek & Tezel, 2015), and social emotional adjustment levels (Ersan, 2016) on the Turkey sample.

The absence of a research that directly examines the relationship between children's emotional expressiveness and mother-child conflict in literature, makes it difficult to discuss the findings of this study. Nevertheless, it is believed that particularly high-level conflicts have destructive effects on parent-child relationships (Laible & Thompson, 2002). In a study (Uzbilir Has, 2016), it was found that, compared to the fathers, the mothers found that both the positive and negative emotions to be experienced and expressed by their children is invaluable, and they accept their children's negative emotions more. It is clear from the results of the study that the level of conflict between pre-school children and parents is higher than their closeness level (Drisscoll & Pianta, 2011). In a longitudinal study (Klimes-Dougan & Kopp, 1999) studying conflict tactics of pre-school children with their mothers, it was seen

that the children's levels of conflict with their mothers peaked at 30th month. At the same time, it was found that in conflict situations with their mothers, the children were reluctant to compromise before the 30th month. In addition, after 30 months, children became more open to reconciliation with their mothers.

In a study (Morris et al., 2011) in which mother and child emotional regulation strategies examined the effect of children on levels of anger and sadness expression, children with positive interactions with their mothers reached less severe anger and sadness. In another study (Binion & Zalewski, 2017), it was observed that with the mothers having emotional dysregulation, the children expressed more anger and they had less effort to express feelings of sadness. In other words, the children of mothers who have difficulties in regulating their feelings in their interaction with other individuals, including their children, display a higher level of anger and feel shyness if they are to express their feelings of sadness. The results of the mentioned study are similar to those of this study.

In another study (Huang, Teti, Caughy, Feldstein & Genevro, 2007) in which the emotional reactions of mothers and children were examined during the mother-child conflict, 91% of the mothers displayed neutral emotions and the children responded with 80% neutral feelings to their mothers. In the same study, mothers responded with 3% negative feelings in case of conflict, while children responded with 18% negative feelings. This study also reached the conclusion that children's levels of anger expression accounted for 11% of their conflicts with their mothers. It can be said that negative emotional expressions of children increase the conflict between mother and child.

Only data obtained from the quantitative scales were used in the study. In subsequent studies, both quantitative and qualitative data on children's abilities to express their emotions and mother-child relationships can be collected and analysed. It may be useful to examine the relationships between the abilities and difficulties of children, especially in regulating their negative (anger) feelings, and the conflicts between mother and child. An important limitation of the study is that it does not include children between 0-36 months. There's a need for studies that both analyse the children's level of expressing their emotions until the end of the pre-school period, starting from the new-born babies, and the level of conflict with the mothers.

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